

Evaluating the Charlotte Housing Authority's Moving Forward Program: Initial Implementation and Baseline Data

Introduction

In December 2007 the Charlotte Housing Authority (CHA) received final approval to participate in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Moving to Work Program (MTW). MTW was enacted by Congress in 1996 to address criticisms that assisted housing programs breed dependency, undermine participant work ethic, and trap participants in areas with limited employment and educational opportunities. MTW is a demonstration program that affords selected housing authorities with the flexibility to design and test innovative approaches to providing decent, affordable housing to low-income families. Participating housing authorities can request exemptions from the rules that apply to both the public housing (Section 9) and Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) programs. MTW also allows housing authorities to combine their federal public housing operating subsidies, tenant-based assistance, and capital budgets into a single, flexible account. The regulatory and financial flexibility offered by the program are designed to further three goals:

1. Achieve greater cost effectiveness;
2. Increase the housing choices of low-income households; and/or
3. Assist households in achieving self-sufficiency.

The MTW agreement does, however, require participating agencies to ensure that at least 75 percent of the families assisted are very low-income, to assist substantially the same number of eligible families, and to provide housing for a comparable mix of family sizes as would have been served absent the demonstration. The term of the MTW agreement is ten years, although HUD can terminate the agreement if violated. The CHA is one of thirty-five housing authorities across the country participating in the MTW program.

As a demonstration program it is important to track the extent to which the CHA's MTW program is furthering the three program objectives and to learn from the experience in designing and implementing the program. To do this, the CHA has contracted with the Center for Urban and Regional Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to conduct a long-term evaluation of the program. This report presents a description of the program and its initial